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ABSTRACT

Help Elderly Locate Positions (HELP), sponsored by the Emerald Empire Council on Aging and funded by the Administration on Aging, is a non-profit employment referral service for older workers, 55 and older, that has helped 1,206 elderly workers find jobs. A major area of involvement at HELP focused on exposing the older job seeker to the Occupational Information Access System and observing his reactions to the system. Upon completion of the OIAS questionnaire, which lists occupations to explore appropriate to aptitudes and interests, fifteen new registrants were asked to complete an evaluation of the process. The evaluation was concerned with their impressions of the system, opinions toward older people entering new occupations, their consideration of professions indicated suitable by the system, and their ratings of various sources of occupational information. Results indicated a favorable reaction of OIAS usage in a counseling context. (EA)

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"OLDER JOB SEEKERS AND OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION"*

Leonard D. Adams and W. Michael Anderson

Help Elderly Locate Positions (HELP) is a non-profit employment referral service for older workers 55 and older. Sponsored by the Emerald Empire Council on Aging, which has secured funds from the Administration on Aging, this entity has been able to help 1,026 elderly workers find jobs since its inception in January, 1968.

HELP is staffed by two part-time salaried workers and fourteen volunteer workers, all over age 55. These individuals engage in a number of tasks that range from office housekeeping to visiting establishments in the community in an effort to generate jobs for its clientele.

A major area of involvement at HELP centered around exposing a system of occupational information to the older job seeker and observing their reactions to it. The system, entitled the Occupational Information Access System, is basically one which improves the accessibility of occupational labor market information for career planning. As you would expect, the system is ordinarily used by much younger job seekers looking for a career to follow. We, however, felt that it might be fun and perhaps useful to see how older people reacted to it.

OIAS is a system which delivers different kinds of occupational information in various ways. For instance, if one wants to know some specific information about a particular occupation such as a description of job duties, a wage rate, aptitudes and attitudes necessary to the job, where training can be found, what the employment outlook for the job is, etc., he can use a number of different means: a computer terminal; a card sort system; a set of relevant books with a bibliography telling where various kinds of information can be found; a file of cassette tapes which interview people in the job; or a personal visits file which allows the job seeker to actually visit with someone in the job. On the other hand, if one simply wishes a list of occupations to explore, appropriate to his or her aptitudes and interests, he can answer the OIAS questionnaire which will furnish him with this information.

It was primarily in the latter capacity that OIAS was used at HELP. Using the card sort form of OIAS, we thought it would be interesting to see how older people reacted to an instrument which suggested new occupations to try.

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*From "Help Elderly Locate Positions" a project in occupational information conducted for Professor Ester Mathews, University of Oregon, December 1971.

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In administering the OIAS questionnaire we sat down with each HELP registrant and jointly reviewed the questionnaire. This was done so each individual would understand the meaning and intent of each question. (Since the card sort was somewhat cumbersome, we thought some assistance was needed.)

After each questionnaire was completed and feedback was given, we asked the individual to complete an evaluation of the process. The form used can be found in the Appendix. We were able to conduct this process with 15 individuals. More would have been conducted but the number of new registrants coming in person to the HELP office was only around 2 or 3 per day. Below are the results to each question.

Question 1: What is your impression of the system?

"Interesting. Good."
"Gets one's mind out of a rut. System opens up possibilities one never thinks of. Too many people have preconceived ideas."
"Gives insight on knowing what you can do - taps hidden abilities. Surprised that I had potential to be a free-lance writer."
"Very interesting; valuable in looking for a job; it's a lot of fun."
"Like a game - very interesting."
"Was accurate in that I had held lots of the occupations suggested. It would give the job seeker a good starting point."
"Worthwhile for a younger person - anyone 35 down - for older workers the system should be used with a counselor."
"I think it may be a practical way to find a job suited to an applicant."
"It is much more geared to the older individual. Example: questions on eyesight and deafness. Also by the wording of some of the questions which ask "what kind of jobs would you take."

Question 2: Do you think that older people looking for work should consider the possibility of going into occupations that they have never held before?

Definitely Yes	6
Yes	7
No	1
Definitely No	0
No Response	1

Why or why not?

"One can always learn things."
"There are many opportunities."
"Older workers may never have had the opportunity to do something that they have never done before; also if they needed or wanted to work they should consider all options; (If one is on Social Security he can often afford to do different things)."
"Important to look at other fields and explore other interests."
"They should consider other possibilities especially if they are mentally alert. Older people need changes as well as younger people. It often depends on the individual."
"Only if better opportunity arises."
"Maybe one can learn something new. Those who sit back and hold their hands get old fast - especially men who don't have any hobbies or interests."
"Depends on the person."
"Depends on the amount of training involved."
"Because it is a real challenge. People don't really have to stay in their same old ruts if there is an opportunity to do something they would like to try that is different."

Question 3: Have you ever held any of the occupations which this system says you could be suited for?

Yes	15
No	0

Question 4: Would you seriously consider going into some of the occupations which this system says you could be suited for?

Yes	12
No	3

Question 5: Aside from a source that would list specific job openings, how would you rate the following sources of occupational information as being important to you? Please rank each source from 1 to 7.

Mean Ranking	
2.93	A source that would provide a description of job duties.
3.55	A source that would tell me the aptitudes and abilities necessary to do the job.
4.07	A source that would tell me about the employment outlook for a particular job.
4.21	A source that would tell me how to look for a job.
4.21	A source that would suggest new occupations I could try.
4.25	A source that would tell me where I can get training.
4.93	A source that would give me information on wages, hours, and benefits.

Mean age of all respondents - 65
Mean number of occupations suggested for each respondent - 45

In examining the results of this evaluation, we were very impressed by the out-going spirit of these older individuals. This was clearly brought out by the responses to questions 2 and 4.

In addition, we were pleased with the reaction toward OIAS. We felt that part of the favorable reaction was attributable to OIAS's usage in the counseling context. We certainly felt that having an opportunity to discuss the consequences of a certain response to a question, showing which occupations would be eliminated or maintained, was invaluable. Finally, we felt that the response to question 3 (where all respondents indicated they had held some of the occupations which OIAS said they could be suited for) is somewhat of a reflection of the validity of the system itself.

We felt that the most crucial question asked, however, was #5, asking respondents to rank sources of occupational information. It appears that so much of the current occupational information and vocational counseling itself is so geared to the younger individual that the older person is often left out. Hence, we made a stab at trying to measure what sources of occupational information seemed important to them. The differences between rankings are for the most part slight. However, it is interesting to see where these older workers place their priorities. Hopefully, more extensive research will be pursued in this area so labor market information can be somehow tailored to meet this forgotten group's needs.

APPENDIX

OIAS EVALUATION: HELP OFFICE

age_____

sex_____

1. What is your impression of the system?

2. Do you think that older people looking for work should consider the possibility of going into occupations that they have never held before?

   Definitely Yes Yes No Definitely No

   Why or why not?

3. Have you ever held any of the occupations which this system says you could be suited for?

   Yes No

4. Would you seriously consider going into some of the occupations which this system says you could be suited for?

   Yes No

5. Aside from a source that would list specific job openings, how would you rate the following sources of occupational information as being important to you? Please rank each source from 1 to 7.

   _____ A source that would provide a description of job duties

   _____ A source that would tell me where I can get training

   _____ A source that would tell me how to look for a job

   _____ A source that would suggest new occupations that I could try

   _____ A source that would give me information on wages, hours, and benefits

   _____ A source that would tell me about the employment outlook for a particular job

   _____ A source that would tell me the aptitudes and abilities necessary to do the job

   _____ Number of occupations suggested